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# Crafting an Interesting Job: Stimulating an Active Role of Older Workers in Enhancing Their Daily Work Engagement and Job Performance

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## ABSTRACT

Since workforces are aging rapidly worldwide, older workers need to work longer. Therefore, this study investigated active ways through which older workers shape their job to age successfully at work. We build on the lifespan psychology literature and the activation hypothesis to argue that activating workdays, characterized by high work pressure and high autonomy, stimulate older workers to engage in job crafting behaviors aimed at making their jobs more interesting (i.e., interests crafting) rather than in job crafting behaviors aimed at lowering their work pressure (i.e., work pressure crafting). Interests crafting in turn enhances the work engagement and job performance of older workers. We conducted a daily diary study among 128 older workers and found that activating workdays were indeed positively associated with daily interests crafting, and that daily interests crafting was positively related to daily work engagement and daily job performance. In contrast, we found that although daily work pressure was positively associated with daily work pressure crafting, an activating workday was not, and engaging in work pressure crafting was negatively associated with daily work engagement and job performance. These results demonstrate that older workers can be stimulated daily to engage in effective job crafting behaviors to make sure that they are motivated and productive members of the workforce.

Due to aging populations and the extension of working lives (Bal, Kooij, & Rousseau, 2015), the number of older workers in organizations has been increasing. To ensure a productive workforce that can keep up with the employment growth, it is of profound importance that older workers stay motivated and able to continue working (Pak, Kooij, De Lange, & Van Veldhoven, 2019). Many studies have thus examined organizational policies and practices to increase work engagement (as indicator of motivation) and job performance (as indicator of ability) of older workers (e.g., Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007), yet implicitly treating older workers primarily as passive recipients of these organization initiatives (Kooij, Tims, & Kanfer, 2015). However, an increasing amount of studies show that older adults shape their own environment to adapt to the aging process and engage in particular strategies to deal with age-related changes on a daily basis (e.g., Knecht & Freund, 2017; Wahl, Iwarsson, & Oswald, 2012). In line with this reasoning, Kooij (2015) and Kooij and colleagues (2015) have argued that job crafting, that is, continuously adapting the job to changing personal preferences, motives, and abilities, will lead to positive worker outcomes and will help older workers to age successfully at work.

However, there are yet no empirical studies that examine whether and which type of daily job crafting behaviors lead to positive worker outcomes on that particular day among older workers and whether organizations can stimulate daily job crafting behavior of older workers.

Therefore, in this study, we build on lifespan psychology literature (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995) and we examine whether an activating workday, characterized by high work pressure and high autonomy, will stimulate job crafting behavior on that day, and whether job crafting behavior is associated with work engagement and job performance on that day among older workers. Following socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen, 1995) and the selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), we focus on two types of crafting: (a) interests crafting which refers to the self-initiated changes that individuals make in their work to make it more enjoyable; and (b) work pressure crafting which refers to self-initiated changes that individuals make in their work to lower their work pressure. SST proposes that older workers have a relatively short future time perspective. Therefore, they are more focused on the present and on short-term goals of pleasant experiences,

such as performing an interesting job, rather than on negative experiences, such as trying to lower their work pressure (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dijkers, 2011). Hence, older workers are likely to make changes on the short term and to reap the benefits of an activating workday to make the job more interesting on a daily basis. Similarly, the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) proposes that older adults use particular strategies to deal with age-related losses in their resources. Previous studies have shown that when individuals experience momentary goal conflict (e.g., due to increased levels of work pressure on activating workdays) they are more likely to engage in optimization strategies (i.e., interests crafting) to deal with the conflict and not in loss-based selection (i.e., work pressure crafting; Knecht & Freund, 2017). Therefore, we argue that an activating workday would stimulate interests crafting among older workers on that day and in turn that interests crafting is associated with positive worker outcomes among older workers on that day. In contrast, work pressure crafting is not likely to be stimulated by activating workdays, and is not associated with higher work engagement and job performance on that day among older workers.

Following our reasoning, we examine antecedents and outcomes of job crafting on a momentary basis, using a diary study. By repeatedly sampling employees' current behaviors and experiences in real time, and in their natural workplace environments, we are able to capture day-to-day fluctuations, minimize recall bias, and maximize ecological validity. Job crafting is a continuous process because employees craft their jobs every day (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In addition, job characteristics, work engagement, and job performance fluctuate from day-to-day (e.g., Binnewies, Sonnentag, & Mojza, 2009; Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012; Sonnentag, 2003; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Since cross-sectional or long-term longitudinal studies cannot capture these day-to-day changes, "the results of such a study are highly questionable" (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010, p. 79).

With this study we contribute to the literature on aging at work and job crafting in three ways. First, previous studies on retaining older workers and successful aging at work have predominantly treated older workers as passive recipients of organizational measures and the work environment (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009). We demonstrate that older workers may play an active role in shaping their work environment on a daily basis and provide insights in the types of strategies that are effective among older workers on a daily basis. More particular, we demonstrate that on activating workdays older workers adjust their job to their personal preferences and motives out of their own initiative, which relates positively to their work engagement and job performance. In contrast, we found that an activating workday is not associated with work pressure crafting and that work pressure crafting is negatively associated with daily work engagement and job performance. The SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) proposes that older adults engage in three types of strategies to deal with age-related changes; selecting viable outcomes, optimizing personal resources, such as personal interests, to reach these outcomes (e.g., interests crafting), and compensating for resources losses. Selection can either be elective (i.e., selecting what one prefers to do at work) or loss-based (i.e., selecting what one still can do, which is related to work pressure crafting). In this study, we find that optimization (i.e., aligning the job to personal resources) is beneficial

for older workers, however loss-based selection (e.g., reducing work pressure) is not.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on aging at work by focusing on within-person dynamics. More particularly, we provide insights into the external circumstances that may stimulate within-person fluctuations in job crafting behavior and its outcomes from day-to-day by examining when older workers engage in job crafting behavior. Most studies on work engagement and job performance and on the role of job characteristics among older workers focus on the between-person level assuming that these variables are stable within an individual employee. However, SST proposes that older adults focus on the here and now and on short-term goals and positive experiences. With this study, we thus specify SST and what it means for work behavior on a daily basis. We demonstrate that on days that older workers experience high work pressure and high autonomy, they are activated and therefore more inclined to engage in interests crafting but not in work pressure crafting, and are thus more engaged and productive. Thus, in line with SST, older workers are likely to reap the benefits of an activating workday to make the job more interesting on a daily basis. In addition, whether an older worker experiences an activating workday (i.e., high work pressure and autonomy) might depend on the tasks performed on a particular day and thus changes from day-to-day. To capture these relationships between intra-individual fluctuating experiences and behaviors in the work context and overcome retrospective bias (e.g., Reis & Gable, 2000), we conducted a daily diary study.

Third, this study contributes to the literature on job crafting. Although many studies on job crafting focus on crafting in terms of job demands and job resources, we focus on interests crafting and contrast its antecedents and outcomes with work pressure crafting. Hence, following Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) who conceptualized job crafting as a mechanism for employees to align their job with their personal resources, we take personal resources (i.e., interests) as the point of departure and not job demands and job resources (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Kooij, Van Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, & Denissen, 2017).

### STIMULATING JOB CRAFTING BEHAVIOR AMONG OLDER WORKERS: THE ROLE OF ACTIVATING WORKDAYS

Job crafting refers to the "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179), aimed at improving the fit between the job and their personal preferences, motives, and abilities (e.g., Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012). Previous research has shown that employees craft their job on a daily basis (e.g., Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2014), indicating that job crafting behavior changes from day-to-day. Different types of job crafting behavior have been distinguished, such as task, relational, and cognitive crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and strengths and interests crafting (Kooij et al., 2017). Since we focus on older workers and previous literature has shown that older adults focus on short-term positive experiences and that older workers particularly value an interesting job (e.g., Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani, & Slowik, 2007; Kooij et al., 2011; Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer, Zaniboni, & Fraccaroli, 2012), we focus on interests crafting as optimization strategy in this study. Interests are objects and activities into which people are motivated to invest their energy and time (Kandler,

Zimmermann, & McAdams, 2014). Interests crafting thus refers to the self-initiated changes that individuals make in their work to make it more enjoyable (Kooij et al., 2017). In addition, we include work pressure crafting, that is, the self-initiated changes that individuals make in their work to lower their work pressure, as a loss-based and thus a more negative strategy and contrast the antecedents and outcomes of interests crafting with work pressure crafting.

Building on the activation hypothesis (Karasek, 1979), we propose that experiencing an activating workday characterized by high work pressure and high autonomy on that particular day will stimulate interests crafting but not work pressure crafting on that day. The literature on human agency proposes that humans are reflective, self-regulating agents who are not only products but also producers of their environment (Bandura, 1982; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006), particularly when they experience an activating workday. We thus build on the concept of an active job, which is characterized by high levels of job resources and high levels of job demands (De Lange et al., 2010; Karasek, 1979; Petrou et al., 2012) and we focus on work pressure as job demand and autonomy as job resource in this study. Work pressure in the current study refers to the perception of an employee that he or she has too many tasks to do on a certain day (Greenglass, Burke, & Moore, 2003). Autonomy is the amount of freedom, independence, and discretion an individual has in deciding how the work should be organized and conducted (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). In active jobs, work pressure does not induce strain because employees have the appropriate autonomy to deal with the work pressure they experience (e.g., Petrou et al., 2012). On the contrary, Karasek (1979) proposed that working in an active job leads to the development of new behavior patterns both on and off the job. More particularly, Karasek (1979) argued that in active jobs, high levels of autonomy help to channel the high arousal resulting from work pressure in active problem solving behavior such as modifying the job (Martín, Salanova, & Peiró, 2007). In line with this reasoning, Martín and colleagues (2007) found that an active job elicits individual innovation, or the introduction and application of new ideas, processes, and procedures to a particular job. Building on this literature, Petrou and colleagues (2012) argued and found that an activating workday stimulates job crafting behavior in terms of seeking resources on that day.

Building on the literature on lifespan development, we argue that older workers in particular will engage in interests crafting rather than work pressure crafting on active workdays characterized by high work pressure and high job autonomy. The SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) proposes that older adults use three strategies to deal with age-related gains and losses on a daily basis: (a) selection involves setting and selecting goals based on what one prefers to do (so called elective selection) and on what one still can do (loss-based selection; e.g., work pressure crafting); (b) optimization involves obtaining, improving, and coordinating the use of personal resources, such as personal interests, to achieve important goals (e.g., interests crafting); and (c) compensation involves acquiring and using alternative means to reach these goal. The use of these strategies is triggered by the aging process but also by the (daily) work environment (Zacher & Frese, 2011); previous studies have shown that when individuals experience momentary goal conflict (e.g., due to increased levels of work pressure on activating workdays) they are more likely to engage in optimization strategies to deal with this conflict (e.g., Knecht & Freund, 2017). In addition, SST (Carstensen, 1995) proposes that older workers have a

shorter time perspective and thus focus on the short-term and positive experiences. Hence, older workers who experience an activating workday are likely to reap the benefits on the short term and use their high levels of work pressure and autonomy to optimize their personal resources and craft their job such that they can do what they like rather than engaging in a loss-based strategy such as work pressure crafting.

Furthermore, daily work pressure is a job demand that requires sustained effort and leads to psychological and physiological costs and thus loss of resources on that day (e.g., in time and energy; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Since older workers suffer from age-related losses in their resources, this additional resource loss is extra salient to them. Fortunately, older workers will be more capable of channeling the high arousal they experience from work pressure on a particular day into interests crafting, because they are better in regulating their emotions on a daily basis (Scheibe, Spieler, & Kuba, 2016; Yeung & Fung, 2012). Emotion regulation involves controlling the type, extent, and timing of experienced emotions, which has been found to improve with age because of accumulated self-knowledge and experience (Charles & Luong, 2013). Older workers have been found to compensate for resource losses by engaging in emotion regulation strategies that are supported by a gain in (or maintenance of) other resources (Urry & Gross, 2010). Hence, following SST and the SOC model, we argue that older workers aim to experience positive job tasks on a daily basis and use optimization strategies to deal with momentary goal conflict. They are thus likely to use high daily levels of autonomy to channel the high arousal experienced due to daily work pressure into interests crafting but not work pressure crafting on that day. Accordingly, we propose that older workers will be more likely to engage in interests crafting on days that they experience high levels of work pressure and high levels of autonomy.

**Hypothesis 1:** An activating workday characterized by high levels of daily work pressure and high levels of daily autonomy is positively associated with daily interests crafting rather than daily work pressure crafting, such that there is a significant interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily interests crafting and not on daily work pressure crafting among older workers.

## THE OUTCOMES OF JOB CRAFTING AMONG OLDER WORKERS

Job crafting is known to have several beneficial outcomes, such as work engagement (i.e., a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008) and performance (e.g., Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Petrou et al., 2012; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2015). Since job crafting is aimed at adjusting the job to personal motives, preferences, and abilities, it is likely to improve the perceived fit between a person and their job (Kooij et al., 2017; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). Person–job (PJ) fit refers to the alignment between a person's characteristics (e.g., knowledge, abilities, needs, and preferences) and the characteristics of the job or tasks (e.g., requirements, demands, and supplies) that are performed on a particular workday (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). PJ fit theory proposes that a good fit between the needs and abilities of an employee and the supplies and demands of a job will benefit both the employee and the organization (Edwards, 1991). Indeed PJ fit



has been found to lead to more work engagement (June & Mahmood, 2011; Memon, Salleh, & Baharom, 2015) and better performance (June & Mahmood, 2011; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Memon et al., 2015). We argue that improving PJ fit is particularly important for older workers. Motives and abilities change with age (e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij et al., 2011) and older workers are focused on short-term goals and experiencing pleasure and meaningfulness (Carstensen, 1995). Therefore, older workers are likely to craft their job to continuously improve the fit between their changing motives and abilities and their job (Kooij et al., 2015). Thus, on days that older workers craft their job to make it more interesting, they feel more engaged with their work and perform better. In contrast, daily work pressure crafting is not expected to relate to daily work engagement and daily job performance among older workers. Work pressure crafting is a loss-based selection strategy which means that older workers using this strategy restructure their goal hierarchy to manage losses by either adjusting goal standards or focusing on different goals (Knecht & Freund, 2017). However, such a strategy is often found to be unsuccessful in the workplace in which it is difficult to, for example, avoid additional tasks (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019). Therefore, work pressure crafting will not relate to better PJ fit and is thus not beneficial for work engagement and job performance (Zhang & Parker, 2019).

Hypothesis 2: Daily interests crafting but not daily work pressure crafting is positively associated with daily work engagement (a) and daily job performance (b) among older workers.

Since we argue that an activating workday is positively associated with interests crafting rather than work pressure crafting and that interests crafting is positively associated with work engagement and job performance, it is likely that interests crafting will mediate the association between an activating workday and work engagement and job performance among older workers. We thus propose an indirect effect of an activating workday characterized by high work pressure and high autonomy on work engagement and job performance via interests crafting rather than work pressure crafting. On activating workdays characterized by high work pressure and high autonomy older workers are stimulated to engage in crafting behaviors to make their job more interesting, which will improve the experienced match between their motives and preferences and their job and thus their work engagement and job performance. In contrast, an activating workday will not stimulate work pressure crafting on that day and work pressure crafting will not relate to work engagement and job performance on that day.

Hypothesis 3: An activating workday characterized by high levels of daily work pressure and high levels of daily autonomy has an indirect effect on daily work engagement and daily job performance via interests crafting rather than work pressure crafting among older workers, such that there is a significant positive interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily work engagement (a) and daily job performance (b) via daily interests crafting but not via daily work pressure crafting.

Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

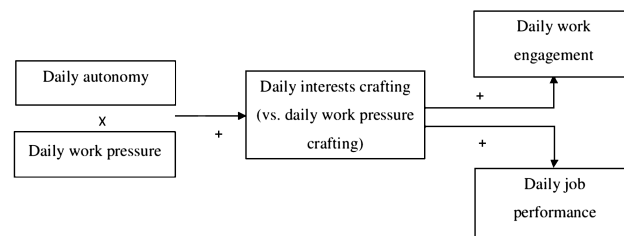


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

## METHOD

### Procedure and Participants

We conducted a daily diary study. Data were collected through an online questionnaire, which contained a general questionnaire and five daily questionnaires. The data collection took place in three Dutch organizations: a rehabilitation center (Organization A), a casino (Organization B), and an online marketing agency (Organization C). Questionnaires were distributed in both Dutch and English. Additionally, only employees of 45 years old or older were invited to participate. Although the cutoff age of 45 is arbitrary, there is no agreement on the right cutoff age for distinguishing between younger and older workers (Matthews, Bulger, & Barnes-Farrell, 2010; Zacher, Kooij, & Beier, 2018). Similar to other studies (e.g., Ilmarinen, & Rantanen, 1999; Kiss, De Meester, & Braeckman, 2008), we focused on workers aged 45 and older, since this is the age at which employees start to experience age-related changes (WHO, 1993). Participants were asked to fill in the general questionnaire first and subsequently to fill in the daily questionnaires at the end of each of the five consecutive workdays.

In total 161 questionnaires were distributed among employees within the three aforementioned organizations. One hundred twenty-eight questionnaires were returned (response rate: 79.5%), with in total 628 daily responses (on average 4.9 days per respondent; Organization A = 249 daily observations; B = 214 daily observations; C = 165 daily observations). On average, respondents were 51 years old (range 45–64), and 45% were female. Almost half of the respondents had finished at least higher vocational education (48%), and on average had an organizational tenure of 14 years (range 1–38 years). On average, they worked 34 hr per week, and 26% had a supervisory position.

### Measures

*Daily autonomy* (average  $\alpha$  during the days = .92) was measured with the scale of Van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994) consisting of four items, which were adjusted to reflect the daily experience of autonomy. An example item is: “Could you decide by yourself how you performed your work today?” (1 = “no,” 4 = “to a very great extent”). *Daily work pressure* ( $\alpha$  = .89) was measured with the adapted six-item scale by Van Veldhoven and Meijman (1994). An example question is: “Did you have too much work to do today?” (1 = “no,” 4 = “to a very great extent”). *Daily interests crafting* ( $\alpha$  = .82) was measured with three items from the scale by Kroon, Kooij, and Van Veldhoven (2013), which measured “crafting an interesting job.” Items were selected on the basis of highest factor loadings in previous research. The items were: “Today I, by myself, made my work more challenging,” “Today I, by myself, made my tasks more alternate,” and “Today I, by myself,

changed my work to make it more interesting” (1 = “no,” 4 = “to a very great extent”). These items are a good representation of the concept of job crafting in this study, as they reflect self-undertaken actions to change the boundaries of a job. *Daily work pressure crafting* ( $\alpha = .73$ ) was measured with three items from the scale by Kroon and colleagues (2013). Items were selected on the basis of highest factor loadings in previous research. The items were: “Today I reduced the number of my tasks,” “Today I refrained from tasks that actually belong to my job,” and “Today I avoided additional tasks” (1 = “no,” 4 = “to a very great extent”).

*Daily work engagement* ( $\alpha = .91$ ) was measured with a six-item scale developed by Xanthopoulou and colleagues (2009). The scale was developed by shortening and adapting a previous scale consisting of 17 items (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). An example item is: “Today I felt happy when working intensively” (1 = “completely disagree,” 7 = “completely agree”). *Daily job performance* ( $\alpha = .88$ ) was measured by a short scale (three items) developed by Pettit, Gorris, and Vaught (1997). An example question is: “Today, how would you evaluate your performance in general?” (1 = “very bad,” 5 = “excellent”).

#### Control variables

In the analyses, we controlled for organization, using two dummy variables. We found significant differences among the three organizations in general levels of daily autonomy, daily work pressure, daily interests and work pressure crafting, and daily work engagement. Hence, it was deemed appropriate to control for organizations in the analyses.

#### Analytical Approach

ICC calculations showed 87.9% between-group variance (differences between individuals) and 12.1% within-group variance (differences between the days nested within the individual) in daily autonomy and 83.7% between-group variance and 16.3% within-group variance in daily work pressure. Furthermore, analyses showed that in daily interests crafting 55% of the total variance could be explained by between-group differences and 45% by within-group differences. For work pressure crafting, this was respectively 91% (between-group) and 9% (within-group). The ICC calculations for daily work engagement revealed that between-group differences explained 63.3% of the total variance. Within-group differences explained 36.7% of the total variance within work engagement. For daily job performance, the

total variance explained by between-group differences was 51% and within-group differences was 49%. Since a large percentage of the total variance is explained at the within-group level, we conduct multilevel analyses.

To test the factorial structure of the data, we ran multilevel CFAs using MPlus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015). We first tested a six-factor model with the six multi-item variables under study (Level 1; autonomy, work pressure, interests crafting, work pressure crafting, work engagement, and job performance). The proposed six-factor model obtained a good fit ( $\chi^2 = 749.38$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 260$ ; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .92; SRMR within = .06; SRMR between = .00). The model fitted better than a five-factor model (where work engagement and job performance loaded on one factor;  $\chi^2 = 1219.85.88$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 265$ ; RMSEA = .08; CFI = .83; SRMR within = .08; SRMR between = .00;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 470.47$ ,  $\Delta df = 5$ ,  $p < .001$ ), a five-factor model where both types of job crafting loaded on one factor ( $\chi^2 = 1029.15$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 265$ ; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .87; SRMR within = .10; SRMR between = .00;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 279.77$ ,  $\Delta df = 5$ ,  $p < .001$ ), a three-factor model (where both types of job crafting, work engagement, and job performance loaded on one factor;  $\chi^2 = 1898.61$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 272$ ; RMSEA = .10; CFI = .72; SRMR within = .13; SRMR between = .00;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 1149.23$ ,  $\Delta df = 12$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and a one-factor model (where all items loaded on one factor;  $\chi^2 = 4527.78$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $df = 275$ ; RMSEA = .16; CFI = .26; SRMR within = .21; SRMR between = .00;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 3778.40$ ,  $\Delta df = 15$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, we conclude that the current six-factor structure is valid.

Multilevel path analyses were conducted in MPlus to test the hypotheses, which allowed us to test all the relationships in the model simultaneously. Scale scores for each of the variables were used for the path analyses. Independent variables were group-mean centered. We used listwise deletion to be able to estimate the model with the days on which we obtained full responses. As there was missing data, this reduced the sample size to 442 days among 114 participants. For significant interactions, we estimated slopes for one standard deviation below and above the mean of daily autonomy (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

## RESULTS

#### Hypothesis Testing

A multilevel path model was built to test all hypotheses (as shown in Figure 1) simultaneously in a single model. Control variables

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations (SD), and Correlations (Within-Correlations Below the Diagonal and Between-Correlation Above the Diagonal)**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Organization dummy 1			—	-.59**						
2. Organization dummy 2				—						
3. Daily autonomy	2.78	0.84			(.88-.93)					
4. Daily work pressure	1.74	0.71			-.31**	(.88-.90)				
5. Daily interests crafting	2.11	0.83			.09	.02	(.77-.86)			
6. Daily work pressure crafting	1.43	0.61			-.05	.13*	.37**	(.65-.80)		
7. Daily work engagement	4.92	1.09			.00	-.01	.30**	-.06	(.88-.93)	
8. Daily job performance	3.53	0.62			-.00	.03	.21**	-.11	.40**	(.86-.90)

Note. Range of Cronbach's alphas across the days are reported on the diagonals.

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

(i.e., the dummy variables for organizations) were included in relation to the endogenous variables work engagement and job performance, and we also included daily work pressure and autonomy in relation to daily engagement and performance. Table 2 shows the estimates of the paths in the model, and Table 3 shows the indirect and conditional indirect effects. Hypothesis 1 predicted a significant interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily interests crafting but not work pressure crafting. Table 2 shows that the interaction effect on daily interests crafting was significant ( $b = .51, p < .05$ ). Figure 2 shows the interaction pattern. The relationship of work pressure with interests crafting was negative when autonomy was low at 1 SD below the mean ( $b = -.28, p < .01$ ), while it was positive for autonomy 1 SD above the mean ( $b = .58, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that the interaction effect between daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily work pressure crafting is not significant ( $b = .09, n.s.$ ). These results provide support for Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, daily work pressure was not significantly

related to daily interests crafting, but it was positively related to daily work pressure crafting ( $b = .20, p < .05$ ) and autonomy was positively related to interests crafting ( $b = .14, p < .05$ ), but not significantly related to work pressure crafting.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that interests crafting but not work pressure crafting was positively related to work engagement and job performance. Both relationships were positive and significant for interests crafting (work engagement:  $b = .28, p < .001$ ; job performance:  $b = .15, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, although we expected no associations between daily work pressure crafting and work engagement and job performance, we found that daily work pressure crafting was even negatively associated with daily work engagement ( $b = -.20, p < .05$ ) and job performance ( $b = -.15, p < .05$ ). These findings support Hypothesis 2.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted a significant positive interaction effect of daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily work engagement and daily job performance via daily interests crafting but not via daily work pressure crafting. Table 3 shows the conditional indirect

Table 2. Results of Multilevel Path Analyses (Unstandardized Coefficients Reported)

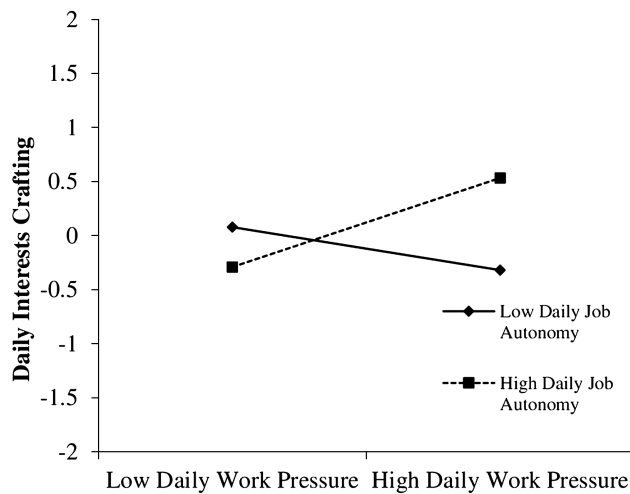
Variable	Daily Interests Crafting		Daily Work Pressure Crafting		Daily Work Engagement		Daily Job Performance	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Organization dummy 1					-.17	.23	-.18	.12
Organization dummy 2					-.58*	.24	-.22	.09
Daily autonomy	.14*	.10	-.02	.08	.02	.08	.02	.05
Daily work pressure	.15	.10	.20*	.08	.03	.09	.02	.06
Work pressure $\times$ Autonomy	.51*	.20	.09	.55				
Daily interests crafting					.28***	.06	.15***	.04
Daily work pressure crafting					-.20*	.10	-.15*	.06
R <sup>2</sup> (within)		.021		.017		.136		.106
R <sup>2</sup> (between)						.078		.047

$N_{\text{Level 1}} = 442, N_{\text{Level 2}} = 114.$   
\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 3. Indirect Effects

Effects	Unstandardized Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval
<i>Total effects</i>			
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Work engagement	.043	.031	[-.008; .093]
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Job performance	.022	.016	[-.005; .049]
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Work pressure crafting $\rightarrow$ Work engagement	-.030	.026	[-.073; .012]
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Work pressure crafting $\rightarrow$ Job performance	-.020	.018	[-.052; .007]
<i>Conditional indirect effects</i>			
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Work engagement for job autonomy 1 SD below the mean	-.079	.058	[-.174; .016]
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Work engagement for job autonomy 1 SD above the mean	.164*	.067	[-.054; .275]
Work pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Job performance for job autonomy 1 SD below the mean	-.041	.031	[-.091; .009]
Work Pressure $\rightarrow$ Interests crafting $\rightarrow$ Job performance for job autonomy 1 SD above the mean	.086*	.037	[-.025; .146]

$N_{\text{Level 1}} = 442, N_{\text{Level 2}} = 114.$   
\* $p < .05$ .



**Figure 2.** Interaction of daily work pressure and daily autonomy in relation to daily interests crafting.

effects. This table reveals that work pressure was positively related to work engagement through interests crafting under conditions of high autonomy (i.e., 1 SD above the mean;  $b = .164, p < .05$ ), as well as to job performance via interests crafting under conditions of high autonomy ( $b = .086, p < .05$ ), while the indirect effects were nonsignificant for low autonomy (i.e., 1 SD below the mean; work engagement:  $b = -.079, ns$ ; job performance:  $b = -.041, n.s.$ ). As expected and already confirmed by the insignificant interaction effect between daily work pressure and daily autonomy on daily work pressure crafting, the conditional indirect effects of work pressure on work engagement via work pressure crafting were nonsignificant for low autonomy ( $b = -.015, n.s.$ ) and high autonomy ( $b = -.046, n.s.$ ) and the conditional indirect effects of work pressure on job performance via work pressure crafting were also nonsignificant for low autonomy ( $b = -.011, n.s.$ ) and high autonomy ( $b = -.034, n.s.$ ). These results fully support Hypothesis 3. Hence, an activating workday characterized by high levels of work pressure and high levels of autonomy was indirectly positively related to work engagement and job performance via interests crafting and not work pressure crafting.

Although an activating workday did not stimulate work pressure crafting, we found that daily work pressure was positively associated with daily work pressure crafting and daily work pressure crafting in turn was negatively associated with daily work engagement and daily job performance. Therefore, we ran post hoc analyses to test the indirect effect of daily work pressure on daily work engagement and daily job performance via daily work pressure crafting. We found that the indirect effect of daily work pressure on daily work engagement via daily work pressure crafting was non-significant ( $b = -.04, n.s.$ ), and that the indirect effect on performance was also non-significant ( $b = -.03, n.s.$ ).

Finally, to test the robustness of our results, we also tested a model where we controlled for the autoregressive effects of the endogenous variables over days, thereby controlling for the endogenous variable in the preceding day (with 299 remaining observations). The results showed that all hypothesized relationships remained significant, and the interaction between daily work pressure and daily autonomy was still significant after controlling for interests crafting in the preceding

day ( $b = .599, p < .05$ ;  $b$  of interests crafting in the preceding day = .647,  $p < .001$ ). Hence, we conclude that the results are stable, even when controlling for the endogenous variables in the preceding days.

## DISCUSSION

In this diary study, we built on lifespan psychology literature (e.g., Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995) and the literature on successful aging at work (e.g., Kooij, 2015) to demonstrate that older workers continuously craft their job in such a way that they can do what they find interesting. Further, we demonstrate that older workers engage more in interests crafting on activating workdays. Hence, we can conclude that it is in particular on days with high work pressure and high autonomy that older workers craft their jobs to do what they find interesting. Interests crafting in turn is associated with higher levels of work engagement and job performance on those days. As expected, activating workdays were not associated with work pressure crafting. Contradicting our expectations that daily work pressure crafting would not relate to daily work engagement and job performance, work pressure crafting was found to be negatively associated with work engagement and job performance. Work pressure crafting is a loss-based and thus more negative strategy to counteract losses in which older workers are likely to downward adjust their work goals. However, since such a strategy is often found to be unsuccessful in the workplace (Lichtenthaler & Fischbach, 2019), the PJ fit of older workers might even diminish, which will even lower their work engagement and job performance. In addition, we found that daily work pressure was positively associated with work pressure crafting. Without autonomy to change their job in such a way that they can do what they find interesting, older workers apparently feel they have no other option than to refrain from tasks that actually belong to their job or to avoid additional tasks.

## Theoretical Implications

With this study we contribute to the literature on aging at work and job crafting in three ways. First, we demonstrate that older workers play an active role in shaping their work such that they can do what they find interesting on a daily basis. In line with the literature on successful aging, we thus demonstrate that older workers exercise agency in dealing with the aging process by incorporating their changing motives in their work (Featherman, 1992; Freund & Baltes, 2002). By adjusting their job to their personal preferences and motives out of their own initiative, their work engagement and job performance increases, and thus they may age more successfully at work. In contrast, work pressure crafting is not beneficial and even detrimental to older worker engagement and performance on a daily basis. In addition, we demonstrate that job characteristics as experienced on a particular day stimulate older workers to engage in effective self-initiated behaviors. On days that older workers experience high work pressure and high autonomy, they are activated to engage in interests crafting (and not in work pressure crafting). With these findings, we translate and specify the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) to the work setting and provide insight in the types of strategies that older workers use on a daily basis and how that relates to their work outcomes. Our findings suggest that older workers are more likely to engage in an optimization strategy (i.e., interests crafting) than in a loss-based strategy (i.e., work pressure crafting), which is also more beneficial.



Second, we contribute to the literature on aging at work by focusing on within-person fluctuations. Since SST (Carstensen, 1995) proposes that older workers focus on the here and now and on pleasant experiences, it is likely that their behavior fluctuates from day-to-day and we conducted a daily diary study. We demonstrate that job characteristics, job crafting behavior, and work outcomes indeed fluctuate from day-to-day among older workers and that day-level experienced job characteristics stimulate day-level interests crafting, and thus day-level work engagement and job performance. With this study, we thus translate and specify SST (Carstensen, 1995) to the work setting and show what it means for behavior and work outcomes of older workers on a daily basis.

Finally, we also contribute to the literature on job crafting by conceptualizing job crafting as a mechanism for employees to align their job with their personal resources (e.g., Kooij et al., 2017). Previous research on job crafting focuses on crafting in terms of job demands and job resources, taking the job as point of departure instead of the personal resources of the individual employee, which is not in line with the initial conceptualization of Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001). In this study, we focus on job crafting as a mechanism to align the job with personal interests and we show that this is more beneficial for older workers than work pressure crafting and that an activating workday stimulates this type of job crafting behavior among older workers.

### Limitations and Future Research

Although a diary study has numerous strengths, such as minimizing recall bias and maximizing ecological validity, our study has a number of limitations. First, although we conducted a daily diary study, participants filled in the questionnaire at the end of their working day. Hence, participants did not answer our questions about their job characteristics, job crafting behavior, and outcomes during the day, but only in hindsight at the end of the day. Future studies could therefore survey older workers multiple times per day to really capture their experiences and behaviors in the moment. Second, we found significant differences among the three organizations in general levels of daily interests and work pressure crafting thus highlighting the important role of the organization. Although we included three different organizations, future studies could replicate these findings in other work settings and also examine the role of organizational factors such as HR practices or organizational climate.

Third, we argued that an activating workday stimulates interests crafting which is in turn associated with work engagement and job performance. However, we cannot prove causality due to the type of analyses conducted in this study. Future research might conduct longitudinal studies including interventions to increase experienced autonomy to test whether increased levels of experienced autonomy indeed stimulate interests crafting when work pressure is high. Such longitudinal studies could also examine antecedents and outcomes of job crafting on the long run. Although the daily nature of our study allows us to capture short-term changes in job crafting behavior and its antecedents and outcomes, it does not really allow conclusions about successful aging at work which is a more long-term process. Finally, this study showed that older employees engage more in interests crafting on activating workdays. However, it is possible that there is a limit to how much work pressure an (older) employee can handle or that an activating workday leads to negative worker outcomes on the next days. Future research should investigate if there is an upper limit to the positive interaction effect of work pressure and autonomy and could investigate the long-term consequences of activating workdays.

### Practical Implications

This study has a number of practical implications for (HR) managers. First, we demonstrate that providing older workers with activating workdays (i.e., high levels of both work pressure and autonomy) stimulates them to engage in interests crafting, which in turn increases their work engagement and job performance. Since (HR) managers are facing the challenges of an aging workforce, these results may help them understand how they can keep their older workers motivated and productive members of the workforce. Previous research demonstrated that older workers are often accommodated, for example, by reducing their work pressure (Conen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2012). However, we demonstrate that work pressure crafting is detrimental to older worker work engagement and job performance. Thus, instead of lowering work demands of older workers, (HR) managers should give their older workers more autonomy to deal appropriately with work pressure. Second, our study refutes common age stereotypes that older employees are less able to handle stress and are less adaptable and flexible (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). We found that older workers engage in interests crafting, showing they can and will adapt, and that they do so even more when they experience both high levels of work pressure and high levels of autonomy, showing that they can handle work pressure in an effective way. Hence, we urge practitioners to abolish age stereotypes and to treat older workers as active agents and to stimulate them in engaging in active behaviors.

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